



THE LEIDEN
COLLECTION





Old Man Praying

Gerrit Dou
(Leiden 1613 – 1675 Leiden)

ca. 1665–70

oil on panel

18 x 12.7 cm

signed in dark paint along right edge: “GDOU”

(GD in ligature)

GD-107

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Despite the dynamic, lively touch of the artist's brush, Gerrit Dou's *Old Man Praying* is a painting of calm, spiritual reverence. Seen from a slightly elevated viewpoint and against an undefined backdrop, the elderly bearded figure kneels in prayer while gazing fervently toward an unseen object of devotion. This undated painting relates closely to four works depicting an aged hermit that Dou executed between 1665 and 1670.^[1] In each of these other works, however, Dou included a context for the hermit's spiritual reverence, whether a crucifix or some other symbolic attribute related to the Christian faith.^[2] For example, in *Hermit Praying*, 1670, in the Minneapolis Institute of Arts (**fig 1**), Dou placed the hermit in a carefully articulated environment that includes a dead tree trunk and an architectural ruin.^[3] With a rosary in hand, the hermit gazes toward the Bible on his lap. Other objects that symbolically evoke Christian spirituality and transience—crucifix, skull, extinguished candle, and hourglass—rest on a nearby table.^[4] This imagery is also depicted in Dou's *The Hermit* (1670) in the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C. (**fig 2**).

One can only speculate as to why, in the Leiden Collection painting, Dou chose to focus exclusively on the hermit's prayerful gesture and not include the types of Christian attributes he included in the other paintings of hermits. One explanation may be that Dou painted this work for a Protestant patron who wanted an image of personal piety and commitment to faith expressed through prayer.^[5] Whatever the motivation for this focused approach to the subject, it seems probable that Dou painted this *tronie* in his studio after a live model, one whom he depicted a number of times in the 1660s and 1670s, including in the Minneapolis painting. The figure's wide-set eyes, nose, and wrinkles above his brow are distinctive features that Dou must have found compelling for his representations of a spiritual individual.

The infrared photograph of an *Old Man Praying* reveals a vigorous and spontaneous undermodeling that suggests Dou painted this figure quickly from life. (**fig 3**) It shows clearly that Dou modified the man's position during the painting process by adjusting the angle of his shoulders to a three-quarter view.^[6] The lively brushstrokes that Dou used to model the figure's face are reminders of the artist's unique ability to render forms meticulously while maintaining a loose and free handling of the brush.^[7] Dou's idiosyncratic, "hatching" style of brushwork is clearly visible along the hermit's temple and nose and on the back of his hands. The energetically and quickly executed background, where the master applied his translucent paint with a relatively wide brush, is visible in infrared as well as with the naked eye.

Old Man Praying once formed part of the distinguished collection of Lothar Franz von Schönborn (1655–1729), Elector of Mainz and Archbishop of Bamberg at

Comparative Figures



Fig 1. Gerrit Dou, *Hermit Praying*, 1670, oil on panel, 33.6 x 27 cm, The Minneapolis Institute of Arts, Minneapolis, The William Hood Dunwoody Fund, inv. 87.11



Fig 2. Gerrit Dou, *The Hermit*, 1670, oil on oak panel, 46 x 34.5 cm, National Gallery of Art, Washington D.C., Timken Collection, 1960.6.8



Pommersfelden, one of the most important collections of paintings in eighteenth-century Germany. By the time Schönborn acquired this painting in 1719, he had amassed a collection of almost one thousand works of art, eventually owning nine paintings by Dou.^[8] In 2006 the present owner acquired this small masterpiece along with another soulful image of an elderly person, Rembrandt's *Study of a Woman in a White Cap* (RR-101), at the same Sotheby's sale in New York.^[9]

- Dominique Surh, 2017

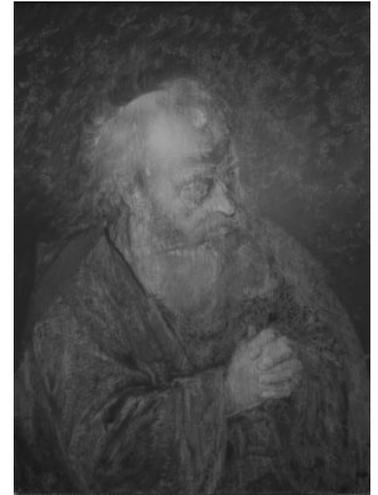


Fig 3. Infrared photograph of GD-107

Endnotes

1. *The Hermit*, 1670, oil on panel, 46 x 34.5 cm, National Gallery of Art, Washington D.C., 1960.6.8; *A Hermit*, 1664, oil on panel, 33.5 x 27.5 cm, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, inv. no. SK-C-128; *A Hermit Praying*, 1670, oil on panel, 33.66 x 26.99 cm, Minneapolis Institute of Arts, The William Hood Dunwoody Fund, 87.11; *A Hermit in Prayer*, 1645–75, oil on panel, 25 x 19 cm, Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, inv. no. SK-A-88.
2. Ronni Baer, “The Paintings of Gerrit Dou (1613–1675),” 3 vols. (PhD diss. New York University, 1990), “Appendix B: Works Known from Sources Prior to 1800.”
3. Ronni Baer, “Image of Devotion: Dou’s *Hermit Praying*,” *Minneapolis Institute of Arts Bulletin* 67 (1995): 22–33.
4. Ronni Baer, “Hermit Praying,” *Gerrit Dou, 1613–1675: Master Painter in the Age of Rembrandt*, ed. Arthur K. Wheelock Jr. (Exh. cat. Washington D.C., National Gallery of Art; London, Dulwich Picture Gallery; The Hague, Mauritshuis, 2000) (Zwolle, 2000), 130–31, no. 33.
5. Annegret Laabs and Christoph Schölzel. *The Leiden fijnschilders from Dresden*. Edited by Christiaan Vogelaar. Exh. cat. Leiden, Stedelijk Museum De Lakenhal; Dresden, Gemäldegalerie Alte Meister, Staatliche Kunstsammlungen (Zwolle, 2000), 35–37.
6. Dominique Surh, Ilona van Tuinen, and John Twilley. “Insights from Technical Analysis on a Group of Paintings by Gerrit Dou in the Leiden Collection.” *JHNA* 6, no. 1 (Winter 2014): DOI:10.5092/jhna.2014.6.1.3.
7. Eric Jan Sluijter, *De lof der schilderkunst: over schilderijen van Gerrit Dou (1613–1675) en een traktaat van Philips Angel uit 1642* (Hilversum, 1993).
8. The present work remained at the palace of Pommersfelden for almost 150 years, until 1867. See *Catalogue de la galerie de Pommersfelden* (Bamberg, 1719), no. 33; *Katalog der Gräflich von Schönborn’schen Bilder-Gallerie zu Pommersfelden* (Würzburg, 1857), no. 541; Otto Mündler, *Catalogue de tableaux de la galerie des Cte. de Schönborn à Pommersfelden* (Paris, 1861), 23, no. 541; Cornelis Hofstede de Groot, *A Catalogue Raisonné of the Works of the Most Eminent Dutch Painters of the Seventeenth Century Based on the Work of John Smith*, ed. and trans. Edward G. Hawke, 8 vols. (London, 1907–28), originally published as *Beschreibendes und kritisches Verzeichnis der Werke der hervorragendsten holländischen Maler des XVII. Jahrhunderts*, 10 vols. (Esslingen and Paris, 1907–28), 1: 352, no. 29a.
9. See Provenance.

Provenance



- Lothar Franz von Schönborn (1655–1729), Elector of Mainz and Archbishop of Bamberg, Schloss Weissenstein, by 1719; by descent to Count Schönborn of Pommersfelden (his sale, Paris, 17 May 1867, no. 24 [to Bamberg for 2500 ff.]).
- Vice Consul Bamberg, Brussels.
- (Sale, Sotheby's, New York, 28 January 2000, no. 39; sale, Sotheby's, New York, 26 January 2006, no. 15 [Otto Naumann Ltd., New York, 2006]).
- From whom acquired by the present owner in 2006.

Exhibition History

- Dublin, National Gallery of Art, on loan with the permanent collection, 1 December 2007–30 December 2009 [lent by the present owner].
- Oxford, Ashmolean Museum of Art, on loan with the permanent collection, December 2009–January 2011 [lent by the present owner].
- Philadelphia, Philadelphia Museum of Art, “Dutch Treat,” 11 October 2011–6 January 2012 [lent by the present owner].
- Leiden, Museum de Lakenhal, “Gerrit Dou: The Leiden Collection From New York,” 9 March–31 August 2014 [lent by the present owner].
- Paris, Musée du Louvre, “Masterpieces of The Leiden Collection: The Age of Rembrandt,” 22 February–22 May 2017 [lent by the present owner].
- Beijing, National Museum of China, “Rembrandt and His Time: Masterpieces from The Leiden Collection,” 17 June–3 September 2017 [lent by the present owner].
- Shanghai, Long Museum, West Bund, “Rembrandt, Vermeer and Hals in the Dutch Golden Age: Masterpieces from The Leiden Collection,” 23 September 2017–25 February 2018 [lent by the present owner].
- Moscow, The Pushkin State Museum of Fine Arts, “The Age of Rembrandt and Vermeer: Masterpieces of The Leiden Collection,” 28 March 2018–22 July 2018 [lent by the present owner].
- St. Petersburg, The State Hermitage Museum, “The Age of Rembrandt and Vermeer: Masterpieces of The Leiden Collection,” 5 September 2018–13 January 2019 [lent by the present owner].
- Amsterdam, H'ART Museum, “From Rembrandt to Vermeer: Masterpieces from The Leiden Collection,” 9 April–24 August 2025 [lent by the present owner].
- West Palm Beach, Norton Museum of Art, “Art and Life in Rembrandt's Time: Masterpieces from The Leiden Collection,” 25 October 2025–29 March 2026 [lent by the present owner].



References

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- Yeager-Crasselt, Lara. "Old Man Praying." In *Rembrandt and His Time: Masterpieces from The Leiden Collection*. Edited by Lara Yeager-Crasselt, 76; 178, no. 28. Translated by Li Ying. Exh. cat. Beijing, National Museum of China. Beijing, 2017.
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- Wheelock, Arthur K., Jr. "Making Faces: The Development of the *Tronie* in Seventeenth-Century Leiden." In *Anonymous Portraits: Dutch Seventeenth-Century Tronies*. Sales cat. Nicholas Hall. New York, 2019, 24, fig. 23.
- Nogrady, Elizabeth. "Gerard Dou, *Old Man Praying*." In *Art and Life in Rembrandt's Time*. Edited by Elizabeth Nogrady et al., 125, ill. Exh. cat. Amsterdam, H'ART Museum; West Palm Beach, Norton Museum of Art. Zwolle, 2025. [Exhibition catalogue also published in Dutch.]

Versions

Versions and Copies

1. Gerrit Dou, *An Old Hermit in a Dark Cloak*, n.d., oil on panel, 14.9 x 11.6 cm, private collection, the Netherlands, by 1940.
2. Gerrit Dou, *An Old Hermit*, n.d., oil on panel, 17 x 13 cm, formerly sale, Bukowskis, Stockholm, 31 May 2000, no. 396.
3. Circle of Gerrit Dou, *A Bearded Old Man*, n.d., oil on panel, 20.7 x 16.6 cm, formerly sale, Christie's, South Kensington, 12 December 1996, no. 245.
4. Gerrit Dou, *Head of an Old Man*, n.d., support and dimensions unknown, formerly Strauss Collection sale, Parke-Bernet, New York, 11 March 1953, no. 7.
5. Gerrit Dou, *An Elderly Man*, n.d., support and dimensions unknown, formerly with Kleinberger Galleries, Paris, possibly equivalent to no. 4, above.
6. Follower of Gerrit Dou, *Portrait of an Elderly Man, Bust-Length, in a Black Coat*, n.d., oil on panel, 15 x 11.6 cm, formerly sale, Bonhams, London, 20 October 2013, no. 72.

Technical Summary

The painting is executed on a vertically grained panel. The panel is made from a single oak plank of Baltic origin with a fell date between 1622 and 1638.^[1] The panel is in plane, but the vertical edges are not perfectly square, as they curve inward slightly in the upper corners. The reverse of the panel is beveled along all four edges, but the bevel is 1.0 to 1.5 cm narrower along the left and right sides than along the top and bottom, suggesting the left and right edges have been trimmed.

The panel was prepared with a light-colored ground that was thinly and evenly applied. The paint has been built up in successive layers. It is so thin in the background that it allows the ground to show through. Dou used low impasto in the folds of the sitter's robe and his beard. He created the wrinkles in the sitter's brow with deep horizontal brushstrokes. A pentimento shows that Dou shifted the outer contour of the sitter's proper left sleeve slightly to the left. This is shown more clearly with infrared reflectography and photographs,^[2] which also indicate that he made changes to the fingers of the sitter's clasped hands. The infrared images show parallel diagonal scratches through ground in the sitter's proper right arm and his face.

The painting is in good condition. The paint and ground are fractured and chipped along the edges, which is further indication that the panel may have been trimmed. In addition to these losses, there are minor paint losses in the drapery and along the edges.

Technical Summary Endnotes



1. Ian Tyers, dendochronological report, November 2010. In an undated dendochronological report, Dr. Peter proposed an earliest felling date of 1623 and a plausible creation date of 1631.
2. Infrared photographs were taken at 780, 850, and 1000 nm. The parameters of the infrared reflectography are unknown.